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FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

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Man, who plants so much sorrow, must learn to plant again the seeds of joy, gladness, and goodwill.

Carl A. Evans

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Since 1949 the purpose of Fellowship In Prayer is to promote the practice of prayer among all religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God regardless of race, creed, or color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes of truth, honesty, justice, and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

Editorial:

Difficult People

Dealing with difficult people involves us in mysteries most of us would avoid if we could. There is no accepted approach in these matters. Even the golden rule, which most of us accept at least superficially, is colored by qualms about justice and fairness, by scruples, by impulses to altruism, and by sense of personal style.

Difficult people come in all forms, shapes, and sizes, and they often pop up at extremely awkward moments. A general rule in dealing with the difficult might seem helpful but... Do we knock out their eye (metaphorically speaking)? Give them our cloak? Hunker down in silence and pray that they will drift off to do their damage elsewhere? Do we argue and talk sense? Or do we just run?

Tough questions!

We are likely to experience difficult people as unclean, frightening violators of our taboos, intruders in our personal space, petty and pevish disrupters of the eternal verities. Do they not do harm? Do they not practice and justify violence personally and socially? What can we do?

Do nothing! These people are good for us.

An ancient saying holds that there are two avenues – and only two, of inward growth: the first "conscious labor", the second "intentional suffering". Intentional Suffering?

Labor after all, however painful, is usually conscious, but intentional suffering sounds mad, contradictory, masochistic. Recent events have led me to look at this advice more closely.

Difficult people – when we are able to look at them calmly, almost always seem to radiate a kind of pain, their own pain. Most difficult people are painfully driven to express themselves at tedious length, or alternatively, they sit stubborn and sullen, making an art of being an obstruction.

During a recent experience with a difficult person, I stopped to catch my breath, and as the arguments and manuverings continued, I had the

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Please notify the Fellowship's office at 134 Franklin Corner Rd. Lawrenceville, N.J. 08648 if you wish to be included on our mailing list, and receive future issues of the Fellowship in Prayer. This bi-monthly publication is available at no charge, upon request to our office. Readers are encouraged to contact us on matters of mutual interest. Contributions to the Fellowship are sincerely appreciated and tax deductable.

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Words of Wisdom

Doth pride lead to vanity? Doth vanity form imaginary wants? Do these wants prompt men to exert their power in requiring that of others which they themselves would rather be excused from. . . ? Do these proceedings beget hard thoughts? Do hard thoughts, when ripe, become malice? does malice, when ripe, become revengeful, and in the end inflict terrible pains on their fellow creatures and spread desolations in the world?

John Woolman

No calamity is greater
Than not knowing what is enough.
No fault worse than wanting too much.
Whoever knows what is enough
Has enough

Lao Tzu

I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee; let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.

John Wesley

Demand from others as little as possible and give to others as much as possible.

Leo Tolstoy

We are told by the psalmist: first to leave evil and then to do good. I will add that if you find it difficult to follow this advice, you may first do good, and the evil will automatically depart from you.

Rabbi Yitzhak Meir of Ger

Prison, Pressure and Prayer

After the third set of gates clangs shut behind you, the realization of where you are sets in. Suddenly you are experiencing more than a century of negative vibrations. You are awaiting the penultimate body and personal property check, and you feel neutered. You are in Trenton State Prison.

However, by the time you reach the school area, the reward is visible and immediate because there are fifteen inmates holding their special passes, ready to settle down for the relaxation program in the glass-enclosed classroom.

Many of them are serving double life sentences, some are preparing for parole, and others are there out of raw curiosity. But they have one thing in common, they want to stay in control of themselves. They have voluntarily signed up for eight two-hour sessions to learn simple but powerful techniques that will help them to shape their lives in directions of their choice.

In an effort to humanize the correctional environment, this Behavior Modification Program in Self-Control was created by Frances E. Cheek, several years ago and was conducted by her until her death last summer. It is currently being taught by approximately fifteen volunteers in as many prisons throughout the state of New Jersey where it was a condition of parole until the waiting lists became so long that the parole board no longer requires participation, although it continues to look favorably upon participants.

Because of community attitudes toward crime and criminals, methods for punishment have become increasingly negative and punitive. Correctional facilities are tense, stressful and hostile because of overcrowding, budget-cutting and general lack of understanding and interest in the penal system.

As unlikely as it may seem, inmates comment on the importance of keeping a sense of humor, of training the mind to stay steady on an object, and of disciplining the body. With serious effort, a cell can be a place of detachment and devotion where one can get in touch with God and oneself. Where else are there so few choices and so much time?

There are hazards, however. An act of kindness can be interpreted as a power play, a sexual overture, or a sign of weakness. It is a prison maxim that in some situations you'd be a fool to turn your back, but more of a fool to spend all of your consciousness not turning your back.

An inmate once said that he believed the greatest protection against violence was the desire to understand another human being's point of view. Obviously, not many are philosophical about being incarcerated, the majority are beset by self-pity, guilt, feelings of unworthiness and fear. But those who accept their situation and make a deal with themselves to use it in the best way possible, come closer to experiencing at least a modicum of peace.

Another inmate said about the Behavior Modification Program: "This class gives me a chance to be myself. No false front. The volunteers are good people. There is an aura of tranquillity and sincerity about them. I appreciate the fact that they are interested enough to lend their time and effort to this type of program for us." Evaluation studies have shown reduced anxiety and

tension, greater self-control, improved self-image and more correct assertiveness as well as decreased charges for violent behavior and increased participation in educational and vocational programs as a result of the behavior modification program. It is felt that the volunteer makes a unique contribution to the rehabilitation of the offender by offering a bridge between the facility and the community. The barriers that sometimes separate prisoners from each other and those who want to help them are lowered by the philosophy, that there is "that of God in everyone".

Scripture tells us that we should suffer the consequences of our past and try to concentrate on what is rather than what was or may be. "When you're a candle all you have to do is shine".

> "peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace, such as the world cannot give. Set your troubled hearts at rest and banish your fears."
>
> – Christ at the Last Supper

Volunteers are trained within the program and give a minimum of two hours a week. Some serve in two or three different prisons. An ongoing quest for qualified men and women to keep these programs going is the principle occupation of its chairman, Mrs. Winifred Canright. She personifies the vigor and hopefulness of this program and brings to it rare skills acquired at the University of Vienna and through study under Dr. Alfred Adler. Mrs. Canright is currently serving as a trustee of the New Jersey Coalition for Penal Reform and the New Jersey Association on Corrections and the Citizens Involvement Project of New Jersey.

For further information on volunteer opportunities in this program, please contact:

Gloria Nouri, Director
Behavior Modification and
Creative Stress Management Programs
State of New Jersey
Department of Corrections
Whittlesey Road
Post Office Box 7387 *(609) 292-6819*
Trenton, New Jersey 08628 *(609) 466-3559*

God expects but one thing of you, and that is that you should come out of yourself insofar as you are a created being and let God be God in you.

Meister Eckhart

PARADOX

for Brahmachari Keith

How, my Lord, can the ground be holy
Where the soul-wrenching cries are heard
Of starving African boys and girls
Their little broken bodies
Twisted, bloated, and covered with flies
In a barren land?

Merciful God, Why is the tragedy of one soul
The blessing of another?
Like the abject poverty of many in Calcutta
Stirring the souls of some rich men
And transforming them into humanitarians?

This seeming paradox so elusive to me,
Why does it hover over my heart and soul
Like a plague?
Filling me with pain and grief
And placing me in a more burdensome frame of mind
Than any walled-in prison could be?

Great Architect of all
To Thee I turn for comforting answers
As I look beneath the world's misery
I see at its core
A Grand S-Y-M-M-E-T-R-Y
A paradox indeed . . .

by Lawrence Smith
1983

The End is Not Yet

Prayer is Still the Answer to Annihilation

VOICING a widespread cry of wounded hope, a resident of Moscow is reported recently to have declared, "We can have faith in nothing but our motherland." There and elsewhere in the world, precisely at a time of increased danger of atomic disaster, many people are trying to find security in the very nation worship that forgets that hopes of peace cannot build upon threats of violence. In the Soviet Union the chauvinism of the nineteenth-century Slavophils seems to have become common. In the Middle East, insane conflict has embroiled religion with nationalism and made the pursuit of death the prevalent way of life. Even in the Western democracies, there is a new sense of international adventure which, more intently perhaps than at any time since World War I, sees national security in terms of challenging the security of other nations – and even tolerates public talk about such former unmentionables as the defensive use of atomic weapons and limited atomic war.

In such circumstances, the temptation is to abandon hope that men and women of good will can make any spiritual impress on the world around them. For those of us who pray, it is to abandon hope that prayer can have power outside a personal and private realm. For the theologically inclined among us, there may be the speculations of escatology, but for most of us any vision of the end of all things is so upsetting that it is quickly put out of sight. To most of us, indeed, the possibility that the continuity of life on earth can end and that the continuity of discoveries of mind and of insights and growth of spirit can conclude abruptly: this possibility is so paralyzing to contemplate that we are amazed that mankind generally is still willing to pursue undeterred the ways of violence.

Faith, of course, is the one way out of this paralysis. It is good to recall that all that is good comes from God and, in the view of all the great religions in the times of their vitality, returns to Him, that sparrows do not fall nor planets terminate without His loving presence, and that we can no more be separated from Him by our single deaths or by our billions-together deaths than we can be separated from Him in life. We may separate ourselves from God, but God is – in all places and in all faiths – always there, whether in the world or out of it. There may not be world without end, but there is always God without end. So long as our lives focus on that fact, they can be kept free of the paralysis of horror and fear.

And then we can do something, even if what we do seems like doing nothing. Perhaps, indeed, our current dangers result in part from our having tried to do something: entirely too much of something, namely, our own will rather than God's Truth. It is only too easy to aggrandize self while working for peace,

justice, and countless other causes good in themselves, and thus to vitiate the work we feel called to do. How important are small beginnings! Thirty-five years ago, when Carl Evans founded Fellowship in Prayer in the faith that prayer alone is the answer to oppression, tyranny, and atomic destruction, the dangers of annihilation were equally obvious, and the resources of the Fellowship were tiny compared with its task. Yet it may be that it is just such small beginnings in the human heart, multiplied millions of times throughout the world, that have led to the survival of the world as a living reality. This possibility seems more likely, at least, than the possibility that survival has resulted from the machinations and maneuvers of governments and political movements. Peace is obviously the most widespread idea in the world, and if contrary ideas of violence spread, the important lesson is that all ideas are contagious, that they spread everywhere, and that no force can bottle them up. If people of prayer are willing to put their lives unreservedly into God's hands, their lives can become contagious for His peace, and they can find themselves, because they are in God's hands, working as his hands for true peace on earth.

But it must be God's peace not ours. It is only too easy to ideologize peace as the possession of oneself and a group of people like oneself – I write from unprofitable experience – whereby righteous people for peace overcome unrighteous people for violence. Such ideas lack contagion; they even lack peaceableness; they lack it because they lack understanding that God is father to the unjust as well as the just, the violent as well as the pacific, the outwardly malevolent as well as the outwardly good. It seems likely the idea of peace can spread only through being brotherly to people who are violent. Are we not all responsible for the disasters of our times? Some of us have been disastrously participant in evil, but others of us have been so disastrously unparticpant in lovingkindness as to be unattractive examples of what we believe. We have thought to let our minds cogitate and our mouths speak, but people are little influenced by words and cogitations.

In one of his probing reflections about the life of the spirit, Dostoevsky writes that we are responsible to all, for all, and for everything, and that our spiritual growth results from recognition of common criminality. Jesus refers to the self-righteous as whitened sepulchres; Hasidistic teaching equates righteousness with estrangement; and the book of Tao calls it antithetical to love. Psychological violence is not unlike outward violence.

The violence around us is part of sick patterns of daily existence in which individual people and individual groups battle to preserve their self-image against others at home, at work, and at play, and even amusements are conflicts hung upon the sickest aspects of self: fear, covetousness, violence, and horror. When we work, play, and amuse our selves, we vote, spiritually speaking, for or against destruction. To vote effectively for life is simply to live in a new way. The spiritual renaissance for which Carl Evans called thirty-five years ago consists of voting against destruction by living in a way centered in Truth. Then our lives are made attractive by the joy and peace and meaning in them, and the hope of peace becomes attractive and contagious.

Herrymon Maurer

News of the Fellowship

A Surrender Group is meeting under the sponsorship of the Fellowship. The group is an outgrowth of our continuing program and a Thursday Night Prayer and Discussion Group that had met weekly for almost ten years under the auspices of the Princeton Meeting of the Society of Friends. The group is open to all interested persons of any or of no religious persuasion. The following description, written in 1975 by members of the previous group also reflects our purpose:

> The Thursday Night Discussion Group is a fellowship of men and women who have become aware of the confusions of customary ways of living, and who join together in openess to one another's experience and to the transforming power of Truth.
>
> We seek, but we are not a seeking group: it is our experience that God must be found at the center of our lives before He is sought. We are concerned with inward tensions, but we are not a therapy group: it is our experience that we are healed not by ourselves but by a far greater power. We consider outward problems, but we are not a problem solving group: it is our experience that problems are not solved by a bundle of precepts, but by a way of life. We aim at growth, but we are not a self realization group: it is our experience that we have to lose our lives to save them.
>
> We have experienced a coming forth from confusion to the extent that we are willing to surrender our selves as the centers of our lives and to accept Truth as the center, and thus to discover a way of life that brings meaning, affection, joy, and some measure of inward peace.

This group is intended to be open to persons from a broad range of backrounds. To that end, the following series of questions pertaining to the general problem of self-will will be used to initially guide the discussions:

1. Do we admit that we are defeated by self-will, and that our lives are beyond our control?
2. Admitting defeat, are we willing to be restored to wholeness?
3. Are we willing to abandon all devices and compulsions and to surrender our lives and wills to a Power greater than ourselves?
4. In abandoning self-will, are we willing to admit to ourselves, to God, and to another human being the exact nature of our troubles?
5. Do we humbly ask that these spiritual and emotional short-comings be removed?
6. While asking God to remove our shortcomings, are we willing to overlook the shortcomings of others, promptly admitting the wrongs we do and making amends?
7. Do we think of other persons before we think of ourselves, always placing God, not ourselves, at the center of our universe?

8. In seeking inward growth, are we willing to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for an awareness of His will for us and for the strength to carry it out?
9. In following a way of inward regeneration, are we willing to surrender to the Truth which is God in all our daily activities, bringing them into harmony with Truth?
10. Do we carry the message of surrender to others and witness it in the world around us?

The Group meets on Thursday evenings at the Princeton Friends Meeting on Mercer Rd., Princeton from 8 to 9:30 P.M. For more information call the Fellowship's office at 609-896-3636 between 9 and 5.

Editorial: Difficult People

Continued from page 1

opportunity to watch and listen while Difficulty continued blasting painfully away at the others in the room. It was for me a remarkable moment. In some strange way I experienced the pain and self-absorbtion of that difficult person. It was painful for me too. I can honestly call it suffering, but in the seeming eternity of the moment or two that it lasted, I began to change.

There is a truism that the one most precious gift of love is presence, simply *being with* the beloved. This is what brings us to stand beside the beds of the dying, and over the cradles of the new born. It is the silence, the deep solace in the touch and even the glance of lovers. It may be all we have to give to God, to reality, and to each other.

With my difficult person the moment of presence happened by accident (or grace) and it was painful. I suffered in a way that is new to me. But it mattered. I chose not to shut it off but to bear it – my pain at their suffering – and to tolerate that suffering for an extra moment more.

Whether "going this extra mile" benefitted my difficult person, I can not honestly say, but it did me. Two little bits of mystery in my religious heritage have become clearer.

E.M.

* * * * *

We need to keep ourselves always turned to the light even as flowers and plants and trees lift themselves lightward. Scientists have found even in the ground in the dark, seedlings are programmed to seek the light. In the darkness of our fears we tend to forget that God's light is always shining and we need to reach for the light to dispell the fears. Even lighting a candle lets the radiance lift us from the gloom into the promise of light.

Zelma S. Dennis

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WEEDS IN MY LIFE

I pulled them up,
Although their beauty
Matched the brilliance
Of the best
Marigolds that graced
My garden –
Sweet petunias –
All the rest.

Yet I knew that
I had done the right,
For their presence
In the way
Could but flourish,
Overtaking,
Bring disaster,
Should they stay.

Shirley M. Phillips

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